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By Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class William Selby
Defense Media Activity

Basic research not only pushes the boundaries of technology, but also provides exciting career opportunities for women, two researchers from the Air Force Office of Scientific Research said last week.

Joan Fuller, a program director, and Air Force Maj. Michelle Ewy, a program manager, were guests on the March 31 Women's History Month edition of the "DoD Live" podcast "Armed with Science: Research and Applications for the Modern Military."

The pair explained that their jobs at the office's aerospace, chemical and material science directorate are to seek out cutting-edge research projects that are particularly deserving of funding.

"If we find research that seems interesting or might be promising for future Air Force technologies, typically we either contact the researcher or the [principal investigators], and we'll have discussions over the phone or through e-mail about their research and where we think it might be able to fit in our particular program," Fuller said.

It can take years to advance from the discovery of a promising scientific inquiry to practical applications for the military. In 2001, for instance, Fuller started working on a high-temperature aerospace materials portfolio. She said she expects the resulting engineering advancements to roll out over the next 10 years.

"This portfolio is unique in that it is the only basic science portfolio in the world that focuses on materials that can survive oxidizing environments above 1,400 [degrees] Celsius," Fuller explained.

In addition to propelling the development of new technologies, Ewy said, Air Force Office of Scientific Research projects forge partnerships.

"One of the great benefits that come out of the research we fund is not just the fundamental knowledge that we gain, but also the collaborations we build," she said, noting that research labs involved in one project may start collaborating on other work that leads to new opportunities.

For Ewy, who grew up in a military household in Virginia, science and the military have opened many doors. She attended the prestigious Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology and continued on to earn an undergraduate degree in chemistry and a commission through ROTC.

"In the Air Force, I've had quite a few jobs, but I've also had the opportunity to get my Ph.D. from the University of Virginia through the Air Force Institute of Technology Civilian University program," Ewy said.

“I feel that I’ve been very, very lucky in my Air Force career,” she added. “I’ve had a lot of wonderful opportunities, and I think it’s given me a pretty good vantage point for sitting here as an Air Force program manager, specifically as an active duty program manager, to have a good idea of how important the basic research is for our Air Force.”

Ewy said she encourages other women to follow in her footsteps.

“There are so many opportunities for young women, girls and older women looking to get involved in science,” Ewy said, and she cited the military as a good avenue for that pursuit.

“You never know what opportunities are going to come from unexpected places,” Fuller added.

[This blog post was modified from the original American Forces Press Service story on Defense.gov]